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GENERAL DISCUSSION ON PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21, FOCUSING ON THE CROSS-SECTORAL COMPONENTS OF AGENDA 21 AND THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and of the World Food Programme in sustainable development

Note by the Secretary-General

At its second session, held at United Nations Headquarters from 16 to 27 May 1994, the Commission on Sustainable Development agreed to review annually developments in the area of trade, development and environment, with a view to identifying possible gaps, and to promote cooperation and coordination (see E/1994/33, para. 40). In pursuance of that request, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission at its third session an extract from the report of the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on the activities of FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the area of sustainable development (see annex).

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Annex

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF FAO ON ITS ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTH SESSION

ACTIVITIES OF FAO AND WFP

Sustainable development

FAO cooperation with the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

25. The Council expressed its satisfaction in the manner by which the Organization was discharging its responsibilities as Task Manager for chapters 10, 11, 13 and 14 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development's (UNCED's) Agenda 21, and particularly its efforts in ensuring wide consultation in the preparation of reports for the review to be made by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) of these sectoral chapters in 1995. The Council agreed that the support to the CSD process of multi-year review of Agenda 21 and the promotion of action to assist countries to move towards sustainable development, constituted an overriding priority in the work of the Organization. The Council reiterated the commitment that the Organization had in assisting in the promotion and implementation of the Rio Summit agreements, in particular in adequately balancing the development imperatives with the environmental protection requirements. It also expressed the hope that the establishment of the new Department of Sustainable Development at FAO would enhance the Organization's capacity to effectively respond to the demands of UNCED follow-up.

26. The Council noted difficulties in the UNCED follow-up process hindering the Organization's desire to make the most effective contribution in support of the CSD in its tasks. The Council noted with concern the lack of adequate financial resources and the reduction of ODA (official development assistance) which could transform the UNCED follow-up into a process in which meetings and reporting would replace concrete action. The Council also noted the proliferation of meetings and initiatives, many of them parallel to those conducted by the CSD and FAO bodies, and the many requests for information and reporting which created heavy demands and an additional workload in the Organization.

27. The Council invited the CSD to seek ways in which sectoral intergovernmental forums could assist in the review of progress and promotion of UNCED agreements, to establish modalities of work which could enable specialized agencies to make a more substantive contribution, and to mobilize financial resources for sustainable development programmes at national and regional level.

28. The Council was informed of the recent meeting of the Chairman of the CSD with the Director-General of FAO, and their mutual interest in finding ways to improve the complementarity of work of FAO in support of the important and complex role of the CSD to monitor the implementation of UNCED agreements.

29. The Council noted with satisfaction the concrete proposals for action, as contained in CL 107/13-Sup.1, related to the Task Manager reports for the four chapters of Agenda 21 for which FAO was designated as Task Manager, and invited the CSD to examine these proposals and seek the assistance of the Organization in their further elaboration and in the formulation of programmes which addressed critical issues of sustainability and, in particular, hunger, poverty and food insecurity.

30. The Council urged Member Nations to ensure the presence of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sector in their delegations at the CSD, so that institutions from these sectors could provide substantive policy and technical guidance in the deliberations related to the review of the "Land Cluster" of Agenda 21 in 1995 and the chapter on "Oceans and Living Marine Resources" in 1996. The Council stressed the need to involve the private sector and the non-governmental organization (NGO) community in a consultative process in reviewing and identifying strategic action in the field of sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

31. The Council requested the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) to follow up on the discussion of the Task Manager reports prepared by FAO, which would take place at the ad hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues of the CSD, and on the reports' proposals for action. The views of these Technical Committees should then be conveyed to the third session of the CSD in April 1995 in order to enrich the debate with substantive specialized inputs and to contribute to the definition of initiatives which could move Agenda 21 into concrete action.

The role of FAO in forest sustainable management and in the UNCED follow-up

32. The Council re-emphasized the importance of the Organization's programmes in forestry and underlined that these played a central role in the post-UNCED process, especially in relation to the implementation of the "Forest Principles" and chapter 11 on "Combating Deforestation" of Agenda 21 for which FAO had assumed the responsibility of Task Manager for the United Nations system in support of the CSD. With regard to FAO/CSD cooperation, the Council expressed satisfaction that FAO had become de facto the main forestry adviser to the CSD and was preparing in that capacity the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on forests.

33. The Council emphasized that FAO/CSD cooperation provided the Organization with the opportunity to demonstrate its capacity for leadership in the rapidly evolving international dialogue on forests through an open interaction with all involved actors, especially Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. The Council noted that FAO's leadership role would be further demonstrated by concrete achievements and results. FAO was urged to recognize the role and capacity of other actors in forestry and to seek effective mechanisms for cooperation and a division of labour among them. The Council considered that FAO should reinforce the work carried out at the regional level, including that of its regional

offices and its regional forestry commissions. Some members urged FAO to continue recognizing the right of indigenous peoples over their forests.

34. The Council welcomed the Director-General's initiative in presenting an "Overall Strategy for FAO Involvement in Post-UNCED Activities in Forestry" and in allocating increased resources to the forestry programmes. It reiterated the need for increased resources for forestry activities, particularly in respect to the capacity to adequately perform its normative functions. In this context, some members underlined the urgency of providing the Forestry Department with the necessary human resources to carry out its extensive tasks. The Council looked forward to a stronger representation of forestry in future programmes of work and budgets.

35. The Council recalled the request of the Conference, at its twenty-seventh session (Rome, 6-24 November 1993), for the Director-General to prepare a report containing concrete proposals for a strengthening of the normative role of FAO in sustainable forest management and its cooperative role in the UNCED follow-up. It considered the Director-General's report prepared in response to this mandate. The Council welcomed proposals for strengthening FAO's role in assisting Member Nations to adjust their forestry policies and to prepare action plans in accordance with the approaches enshrined in the "Forest Principles" and Agenda 21. At the same time, the Council agreed that there was a need for FAO to improve the quality of its forest sector information and analysis, and its dissemination. Some members felt that FAO should make more use of the wealth of data available to it in preparing long-term strategic planning required by policy makers and that it should give more value to potential synergies among its technical departments. The Council recognized the Global Forest Resources Assessment Programme as a key activity, and was pleased to note that additional resources had been allocated to it.

36. The Council also welcomed the intention of the Director-General to support greening of the world by strengthening the Organization's work in afforestation, reforestation and sustainable management of forests and trees.

37. The Council stressed the need for agreed criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. In this context, the Council expressed appreciation for the Director-General's intention to facilitate their integration and harmonization, and to address any gaps that might be identified. This would be done by drawing upon ongoing initiatives, thus including all types of forests and providing a comprehensive coverage of geographical regions. The Council also stressed that FAO should aim at facilitating the convergence of the various ongoing initiatives by providing technical expertise and the forum for dialogue.

38. The Council reiterated its previous calls for emphasis on national capacity-building. It welcomed the intention of FAO to assist Member Nations in the strengthening and adaptation of institutions to operate effectively in cross-sectoral settings and to promote effective cooperation between forestry administrations, the private sector, NGOs and rural people.

39. The Council was informed of the report of the High-Level Panel of External Experts in Forestry and of the Director-General's decision to prepare for

consideration by the twelfth session of COFO and the meeting of ministers responsible for forestry in March 1995 a comprehensive statement on the "State of the World's Forests", a seminar or workshop on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in February 1995, and a paper on the advantages and disadvantages associated with moving towards a legally binding agreement on forests.

40. The Council recognized that the national forestry action plans were the most suitable framework for sustainable forest management at national and global levels, as called for by UNCED. It felt that the revamped concept of the Tropical Forests Action Programme (TFAP), as reflected in the new Operational Guidelines, provided an adequate framework for the implementation of national forestry action plans and allowed for an expansion of the programme to include all types of forests, as already achieved through the Mediterranean Forestry Action Plan (MEDFAP). There was also potential for the application of TFAP principles in countries with economies in transition. In this context, the Council expressed the hope that the Consultative Group on the TFAP framework (CG) be convened as soon as possible.

41. The Council noted that there had been a considerable number of forestry initiatives following UNCED. While these had provided valuable inputs into the international dialogue on forests, the Council stressed the need for harmonization and convergence of the results of these initiatives for effective use by the meeting of ministers and, subsequently, by the CSD for its 1995 review on forests. This provided a major challenge for FAO. The Council considered FAO and the CSD to be the main channels for international initiatives in forestry in close and open cooperation with other agency partners, NGOs and the private sector.

42. The Council expressed high expectations of the outcome of the meeting for the 1995 CSD review on forests, as requested by the twenty-seventh session of the Conference in 1993, and stressed the need for early preparation and distribution of the documents. The Council was reminded that only a few responses to the Director-General's request to Member Nations for suggestions on the agenda of COFO had been received, and it encouraged them to respond. Some members regretted the restrictions in the international trade of tropical timber and other forest products and requested that this issue be included among the items for discussion.

43. It was considered that meetings of ministers responsible for forestry should be held regularly and note was taken of the Director-General's intention to convene such meetings of ministers on the occasion of all future sessions of COFO.